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The State of Polish Language Learning in Ukraine During the War (Based on a Survey of Students and Teachers) 2022–2023

Abstract

This article is devoted to the study of the state of Polish language learning in Ukraine during the war of 2022–2023. The author analyses official documents, language policy, language practice and social responses to the impact of the war on Polish language learning in Ukraine and its current state. This research will help to better understand the relationship between the war and the Polish language in the context of Ukraine, particularly in the Kyiv region. The research included the collection of data from various sources, including educational institutions and surveys of Polish language learners and teachers. The data were analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Keywords: Polish language; Ukraine; Kyiv region; war; language policy; language practice; national minorities

1 Introduction

The study of Polish in Ukraine has always been popular and relevant among representatives of the Polish minority, which traditionally lives in the western and north-western regions of Ukraine. This issue has been repeatedly studied by representatives of Polish and Ukrainian scientific thought, including Stanisław Dubisz, who published a work on the Polish language outside the country (Dubisz, 1997, 2014); Przemysław Gębal and Władysław Miodunka, who prepared a thorough study on the didactics and methods of teaching Polish as a foreign and second language (Gębal & Miodunka, 2020); Władysław Miodunka's separate study on the Polish language in a global context, as well as knowledge of Polish among foreigners of non-Polish origin, is undoubtedly worthy of attention (Miodunka, 1990, 2015; Miodunka et al., 2018); Halina Karaś prepared a work on the revival of Polish in the former eastern borderlands (Karaś, 2015); Levchuk P. studied the concept of the Polish–Ukrainian–Russian trilingualism of Ukrainians of non-Polish origin among secondary school and university students (Levchuk, 2020, 2022); N. Szumlańska analysed the place of Polish in Ukraine (Szumlańska, 2013), etc. The ongoing war in eastern Ukraine since 2014 has led to an increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have been forced to leave their hometowns and villages. Due to changing places of residence, the Polish minority has faced the problem of preserving their linguistic and cultural identity. Professor Andrzej Bonusiak of the University of Rzeszów, in his paper “The Polish Minority in Ukraine in the Struggle for a Democratic, Free and Integral Homeland”, aptly highlighted how the geopolitical situation has changed since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine:

“The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation and the transformation of the conflict, which until now had a “smouldering” character, into a classic war, changed the geopolitical situation in Europe and the world. This led to the development of events that Europe had not faced for decades, accompanied by death, destruction and mass migration of the population. (...) Events began, one of the elements of which was the end of the history of the Polish diaspora in Ukraine.” (Bonusiak, 2022, p. 7)

In his work, the researcher examines the activities and cultural life of the Polish minority in different regions of Ukraine. Particularly important for this study is the third chapter, “At War and for War”, which clearly outlines the position on the joint struggle and support of the Party of Poles of Ukraine, the Federation of Polish Organisations, and the Union of Poles:

“Among the representatives of the Polish community who took part in direct “frontline” actions on the Ukrainian side were military personnel (professional and conscripts), volunteers, members of various paramilitary organisations and civilians. (...) For their choices and decisions, dozens of Ukrainians of Polish origin sacrificed the most precious thing – their own lives.” (Bonusiak, 2022, p. 105)

In his work *Ukrainian–Russian–Polish Trilingualism among Ukrainians of Non-Polish Origin*, Pawel Lewchuk examines the current language situation in Ukraine, in particular the state of Polish, as well as the growing migration of Ukrainians to Poland and the problems most often faced by migrants:

“The fifth wave of migration (since 2014) is caused by political factors which in turn are closely linked to both military and economic factors. Political upheaval following the flight of Viktor Yanukovich, war in eastern Ukraine, an unstable economic situation caused by these factors, the devaluation of the currency, the cost of living, a lack of prospects for the future – all of this leads ever more people to emigrate for economic reasons, but also for educational reasons.” (Levchuk, 2020, p. 54)

The Polish language in Ukraine is gaining even more popularity every year, among children, teenagers and adults, a fact that Władysław Miodunka has well noted in his work:

“(...) in recent years the situation to the east of Poland, especially in Ukraine has changed significantly. As a result of changes and political problems, Polish has become a popular foreign language in Ukraine, which can be seen in the number of Ukrainian students in Polish universities. One needs to remember that the rapid political, social and cultural changes to Poland’s east also result in changes to the situation of the Polish language”. (Miodunka, 2015, pp. 45–46)

This trend is explained not only by the development of economic ties between Ukraine and Poland, but also, after 24 February 2022, by the possibility of shelter and protection in the territory of a friendly neighbour.

Since the beginning of the Russian aggression (as of December 1st 2022), just over 8 million Ukrainians have left for Poland and 6.2 million have returned, according to the press service of the Polish Border Guard (Straż Graniczna, 2022). This explains the rapid growth in popularity of learning Polish among Ukrainians. However, most of those who are still in Ukraine have started learning the language with the aim of moving to the neighbouring country, which has increased the need for Polish language teachers. In this regard, there is a demand for the training of highly qualified personnel and methodological developments.

In his scientific paper on the trilingualism of Ukrainians of non-Polish origin, Pawel Levchuk analyses the educational situation of learning Polish in Ukraine and points out specific shortcomings, such as a certain slowdown in the development of Polish language learning in schools due to organisational issues:

“(...) it is worth noting that the Ukrainian educational authorities are to a certain degree hampering the development of Polish language learning due to organizational issues. In order to start Polish lessons, a Polish language teacher is required and hiring this new teacher may mean that teachers of other languages already employed at the school will have an insufficient number of hours.” (Levchuk, 2020, p. 45)

Levchuk considers the growing interest in the Polish language not only among members of the national minority, but also in learning Polish as a foreign language. However, the events of 24 February 2022 changed the situation in Ukraine and have led to an even greater interest in Polish, which is in part related to a sense of gratitude to the neighbouring country for its support and assistance in such difficult days for our country. Scientific works by Polish and Ukrainian leading scholars, namely Dubisz S. (Dubisz, 1997, 2014, 2015), Gębal P. i Miodunka W. (Gębal & Miodunka, 2020), Miodunka W. (Miodunka, 1990, 2014, 2015) Karaś H. (Karaś, 2015), Levchuk P. (Levchuk, 2020, 2022), Levchuk P., Belyavska, O., Vaseiko, Yu. (Levchuk, Belyavska, & Vaseiko, 2022), Levchuk P., Bihunova, S., & Vorobiova, I. (Levchuk, Bihunova, & Vorobiova, 2022), Bonusiak A. (Bonusiak, 2022), Krasowska H. (Krasowska, 2012), Levchuk P., Stapor, M.E. (Levchuk & Stapor, 2022), Miodunka W., Tambor J. (Miodunka et al., 2018), Shevchuk L. (Shevchuk, 2021), Zielińska M. (Zelins’ka, 2020), Szumlańska N. (Szumlańska, 2013), which preceded Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, became an important basis for this study, in which methods of analysing scientific literature, statistical data, the authors’ own observations and analysis of the results of a survey of students in the Kyiv region studying Polish and teachers who teach it were used. These methods allowed us to obtain objective information about the state of Polish language learning in this region, the needs of students and the problems faced by teachers.

In addition, an analysis has been conducted of national legal documents, as well as international legal documents, pertaining to language and literary education and educational-methodical support. This analysis provided a contextual basis for assessing the compliance of the educational process with established norms and standards in the field of language education. Taking into account these documents, we were able to make a comparative analysis and identify problematic aspects that require attention and improvement.

2 The Organisation of the Educational Activities of General Secondary Education Institutions, which Include Classes Taught in the Languages of National Minorities and Indigenous Peoples

Despite the start of the full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022, education in Ukraine did not stop. In the academic year 2022/2023, the phased implementation of the State Standard of Basic Secondary Education began, and 5th-grade students of general secondary education institutions switched to a new model of education based on the implementation of national and international legal documents in the field of language and literary education, according to model curricula that have been officially approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine of 12 July 2021 No. 795 (as amended by Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine of 10 August 2021 No. 898)). The list of electronic versions of model curricula for languages (integrated courses) for general secondary education institutions that include classes taught in the languages of national minorities and indigenous peoples (Polish) is available at <http://www.mon.gov.ua/> (*List of electronic versions of model curricula*, n.d.) and the official website of the SSI Institute for the Modernisation of Educational Content <https://imzo.gov.ua/model-ni-navchal-ni-prohramy/movno-literaturna-osvitnia-haluz/movy-natsional-nykh-menshyn-ta-korinnykh-narodiv/> (Derzhavna naukova ustanova Instytut modernizatsii zmistu osvity, n.d.).

The organisation of general secondary education institutions, including the teaching of Polish in the 2022/2023 academic year, is carried out in accordance with the following Laws of Ukraine: “On Education”; “On Complete General Secondary Education”; “On the Ratification of the European

Charter for Regional or Minority Languages”. In addition to these laws, institutions operate in accordance with the Concept for the Implementation of State Policy in the Field of Reforming General Secondary Education “New Ukrainian School” for the period up to 2029 (approved by the Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of 14.12.2016 No. 988-p), the State Standard of Basic Secondary Education, approved by the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 898 of 30.09.2020 (*Kabinet Ministriv Ukraïny postanova vid 30 veresnia 2020 r. № 898 Kyïv “Pro deiaki pytannia derzhavnykh standartiv povnoï zahal’noï osvity”*, 2020), and other regulatory documents in the field of education.

The development and revision of new textbooks, as well as the examination of textbooks to ensure that they are granted the appropriate approval by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, has continued since the invasion. In 2022, official approval was granted to the textbooks *Polish Language* (Voïtseva & Buchats’ka, 2022) and *Polish Language. Primer. Part 1. Part 2* (Lebed’, 2022), both for the 1st grade of general secondary education institutions. In 2023, approval was granted to Polish Language (6th year of study) (Voïtseva & Buchats’ka, 2023), for the 6th grade of general secondary education institutions. Electronic versions of these textbooks can be found on the website of the SSI Institute for the Modernisation of Educational Content.

3 The State of Polish Language Learning in Ukraine During the War in 2022–2023 (Based on a Survey)

Institutions of higher education in Kyiv, as well as private language courses and individual forms of study, were the object of this study. Among the Kyiv universities in which Polish is taught, the survey was conducted at: Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (the total number of students of the Department of Polish Studies in 2021/2022 was 52 people. In 2022/2023 the number was 63 people); Kyiv National Linguistic University (2021/2022: 22 people, 2022/2023: 34 people); and V.I. Vernadsky Taurida National University (2021/2022: as a major subject: 68 people, as an elective subject: 64 people, 2022/2023: as a major subject: 62 people, as an elective subject: 68 people). The numbers of those wishing to study Polish in individual language courses in 2022–2023 are quite striking: 2021 – 1,060 people, 2022 – 2,050 people, January–February 2023 – 327 people.

Table 1. Educational institutions in Kyiv on which the study was conducted (author’s own materials).

№	Name of the educational institution	2021/2022	2022/2023
1	Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv	52	63
2	Kyiv National Linguistic University	22	34
3	V.I Vernadsky Taurida National University	68 (as a major subject), 64 (as an elective subject)	62 (as a major subject), 68 (as an elective subject)
4	Polish language courses (on the example of one language school)	1060	2050

A total of 114 people took part in the survey, which was conducted in January–February 2023. They were asked 7 short questions and one open-ended question, namely:

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you been learning Polish?
3. Where do you study Polish?
4. What is your reason for learning Polish?
5. What difficulties did you have when learning Polish?
6. What materials do you use when learning Polish?

7. Are you of Polish origin?
8. Do you think learning Polish is relevant and promising?

The respondents' range in age from 16 to 45 years old, with the average age being 20 years (27.2%). The lowest number of respondents were aged 26, 27, 31, 32, 35, 42, 45 (6.7%).

An important question for the study was "How long have you been learning Polish?". A significant number of respondents have been studying Polish for 6 months (15 people) and for less than 1 month (7 people). In total, the number of respondents who have been studying Polish for one year is 90 people, while those who have been studying Polish for more than one year constitute 24 people.

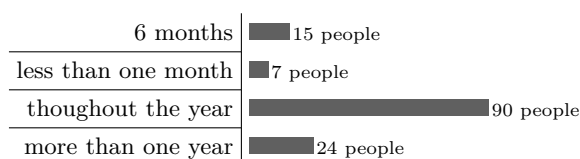


Figure 1. How long have you been learning Polish?

As we can see, the results of the survey confirm the growing interest in Polish, which is due to the situation in the country. A total of 90 respondents have been studying Polish for a year. This increase in the number of Polish learners can be attributed to the significant migration caused by the ongoing war in Ukraine and the search for a safe place to stay.

The next question was about where the respondents study Polish. Out of 114 respondents, 86 people study Polish at a higher education institution (75.4%), 23 people attend language courses (20.2%), 4 people study independently (3.5%) and 1 person has one-on-one lessons with a teacher (0.9%).

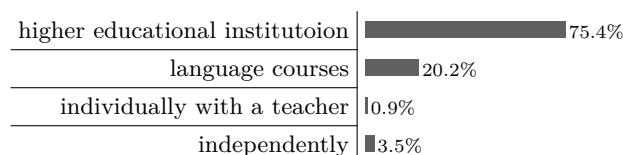


Figure 2. Where respondents learn Polish (author's own materials).

Despite the mass migration and the security situation in the country, as many as 86 out of 114 respondents study Polish at universities in the Kyiv region. This shows that Polish is being learned not only as an opportunity to leave the country, but also in order to establish bilateral cooperation between Ukraine and Poland, develop economic relations and preserve Polish heritage.

As for the reasons for learning Polish, the majority of respondents stated education – 66 (57.9%). 18 respondents indicated work (15.8%), 7 respondents stated tourism (6.1%), and 4 respondents stated migration (3.5%). Other reasons given were to obtain a Pole's Card/Residence Card (1.8%), for themselves as a hobby (2.7%), and for personal development (1.8%). A personal liking for the Polish language, an interest in Polish literature and cinema, communication with Polish friends, and others were also among the reasons for learning. In their work *Dydaktyka i metodyka nauczania języka polskiego jako obcego i drugiego*, Przemysław Gębał and Władysław Miodunka pointed out that it is Ukrainians who are the most motivated:

“...high school and university students have the greatest motivation to learn Polish. They give as reasons the desire to first learn and study in Poland, then to come to Poland to work, with some wishing to settle in Poland permanently and obtain Polish citizenship (...) This is happening because young Ukrainians are aware that Polish is one of the official languages of the European Union and that studying in Poland means studying in Europe, therefore giving them access to the European labour market. For these reasons, Polish is a prestigious language for many young Ukrainians”. (Gębal & Miodunka, 2020, p. 84)

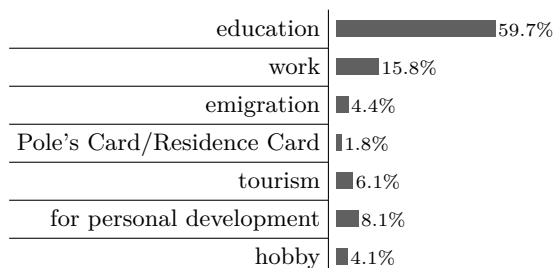


Figure 3. The reason for learning Polish (author's own materials).

The data presented here show that the reasons for learning Polish have hardly changed (Levchuk, Belyavska, & Vaseiko, 2022), but when analysing the prospects and relevance of learning Polish today, we see that there are variations among the motives: the security situation related to the ongoing war in Ukraine; increased cooperation between Ukraine and Poland; forced migration due to the full-scale invasion, etc.

Among the difficulties encountered while learning Polish, the most common answers were related to power outages and lack of Internet access (47.4%). Respondents' psychological state related to the situation in the country (17.5%), lack of motivation (7.9%), and air raids (2.6%) were equally important reasons. As for the options formulated by the respondents, we encountered the following: lack of materials, lack of teachers, personal circumstances, demotivating teachers, lack of practice, lack of time, bad Internet connection, insufficient regularity, and little speaking practice. However, despite the moral and psychological challenges presented by the war, as well problems with power outages and massive rocket attacks, learning Polish continues and is only gaining momentum, cf. Figure 4.

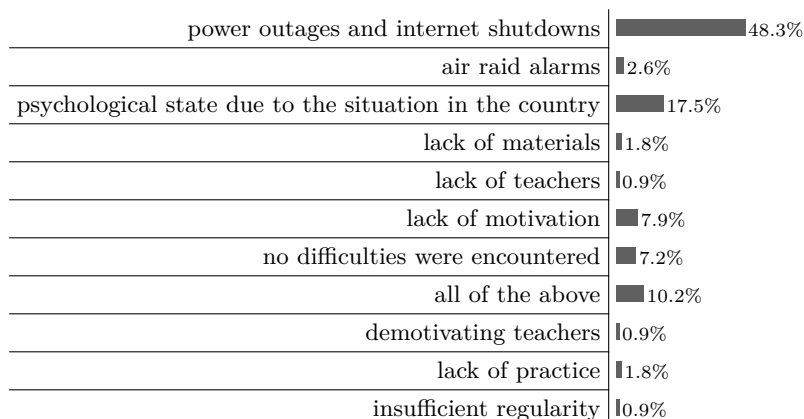


Figure 4. Difficulties encountered by respondents while learning Polish (author's own materials).

In terms of methodological and educational materials, the undisputed leader was a series of textbooks for learning Polish as a foreign language published by Glossa (Stempek & Stelmach, 2012; Stempek et al., 2013), *Krok po kroku* (70.2%) and by the publishing house Prolog (Dixon & Jasińska, 2022; Dixon et al., 2023; Małolepsza & Szymkiewicz, 2022) *Hurra po polsku* (21.1%). Textbooks of other Polish publishers include *Kiedys wrócisz tu* (Lipińska & Dąbska, 1996), *Od słowa do słowa toczy się rozmowa* (Gębał, 2009), *Gramatyka z kulturą* (Maliszewski, 2020), *Gramatyka? Dlaczego nie* (Machowska, 2010), *Gramatyka? Ależ tak* (Machowska, 2012), *Język polski bez granic* (Ciesielska et al., 2018), *(Nie)codzienny polski* (Tambor, 2018), etc.

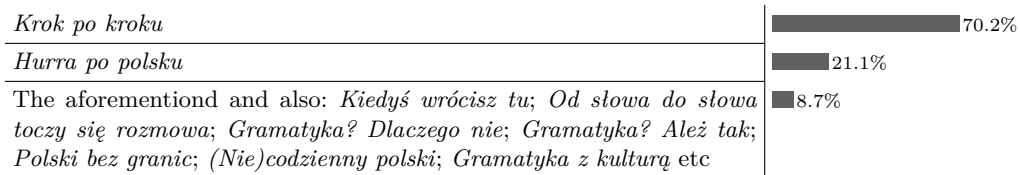


Figure 5. Materials used by respondents when learning Polish (author's own materials).

When asked about their Polish origins, only 24 respondents (21.1%) answered “yes”, while 88 respondents (77.2%) said they had no Polish roots.

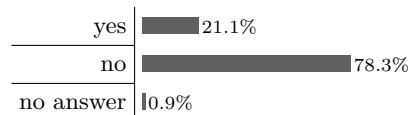


Figure 6. Polish origin of respondents (author's own materials).

Taking into account that the vast majority does not have Polish origins, we can conclude that the borders are expanding, and that now Polish is becoming not only an inherited language, but also a language of the future. Paweł Lewczuk emphasises this point aptly: “Polish is becoming ever more popular due to Poland’s geographical proximity, its significantly better economic situation and the grammatical and lexical similarities between the two related languages” (Levchuk, 2020, p. 44).

For the final open question, “Do you think learning Polish is relevant and promising?”, the majority of answers were “yes”. The most frequently mentioned motive for studying was the security situation in Ukraine, which is undoubtedly related to the Russian Federation’s attack. However, we can identify several main groups:

- studying and employment in Poland, due to mass emigration caused by the ongoing war in Ukraine: “*I think this is a relevant issue. Even without taking into account the increased demand for learning Polish due to mass emigration to Poland as a result of the Russian Federation’s war against Ukraine. People go to Poland to study, earn money, for nearby tourism, etc. In my opinion, in the near future, knowledge of Polish will become one of the desirable conditions for employment for Ukrainians, so Polish will become as important as English, German, French, and Spanish in schools and universities*”;
- the opportunity to find a more prestigious job after emigration: “*I believe that learning Polish is currently relevant. First of all, the situation in the country makes you look for something better for yourself in such a difficult time. Second, it is difficult to find a decent job with a decent salary in a foreign country without knowing the language.*”;

- finding a safe place to live: *“In my opinion, all languages are relevant and perspective, primarily for oneself. I want to add that Polish has reached a new level because of the war, so it is especially relevant for those who had to move to Poland”*;
- the opportunity to communicate with local residents for further integration in the new country: *“At the moment, many Ukrainians live in Poland and study there. Knowing this language gives you the opportunity to communicate with the locals, although most of them understand Ukrainian, but Polish will give you more freedom in communication and confidence in understanding, because there are some differences with our language. Now, on the contrary, Polish may appear in some institutions in Ukraine, and this is very cool”*;
- the opportunity to study at Polish universities, due to the lack of such opportunities in Ukraine: *“In my opinion, Polish language skills are very promising. Especially for future students who cannot study in their native Ukraine”*;
- development of cooperation between Ukraine and Poland: *“Knowledge of Polish is especially relevant nowadays, when Ukraine is cooperating with Poland. I think this cooperation will develop, which will require Polish translators.”*; *“It is relevant and useful. Moreover, in my opinion, in the future it will be possible to work with Polish companies and their branches in Ukraine”*;
- the popularity of everything Polish in Ukraine: *“I think so, because now the cult of everything Polish is being unfolded in our country”*;
- support for Ukraine from Poland and its influence in Europe have led to the popularisation of Polish language and culture: *“given Poland’s political influence in Europe and its assistance to Ukraine”*;
- development of one’s skills and capabilities: *“because it develops a person and gives a lot of new opportunities”*; *“to develop one’s skills”*; *“knowledge of languages is one of the most valuable skills”*; *“Of course, learning Polish is relevant and promising now, because it gives a person more opportunities for development and employment”*; *“In my opinion, learning Polish, as well as literature and history, is perspective and reasonable for Ukrainians”*; *“Learning any foreign language can be considered relevant and perspective, because the more languages you can understand, the more opportunities you will have both in everyday life and in work, in particular in the scientific or educational sphere. Polish can become one of the most powerful tools for changing the stereotypical view in philological science about linguistic affinity, as they are now usually distinguished by geographical features. In addition, knowledge of Polish among Ukrainians will strengthen relations with our Western neighbours, in particular, in my opinion, it will increase the credibility of Polish society, which will thus have a chain effect on other nations. In addition, the Polish language can become an intermediary (between the teacher and the student) for deeper study and promotion of the Ukrainian language both in Poland and in the world in the future.”*; *“In short, for me, it is a relevant and promising alternative to Germany because of the level of bureaucracy, financial aspects, etc.”*

Respondents were also given the options “no” or “partially”. Analysis of the questionnaire shows that the goals and purpose of learning Polish in Ukraine have changed slightly since 24 February 2022. Before the outbreak of war, the reasons for learning the language were given by Levchuk P., Belyavska O., Vaseiko Y. in *The Communicative Value of the Polish Language Among Students in Northwestern Ukraine* (Levchuk, Belyavska, & Vaseiko, 2022, pp. 9–11). The majority of respondents stated the following reasons for learning Polish: the opportunity to work in Poland; the opportunity to study in Poland; the possibility of permanent residence in Poland; as well as cooperation between Ukraine and Poland, self-improvement, better employment prospects in Ukraine, and tourism and family ties. Since the start of the invasion, however, the reasons have changed. They undoubtedly overlap with the previous motivations to some extent, but the vast majority of respondents (about 95%) indicated that the relevance and prospects of learning Polish are primarily related to Poland’s help to Ukraine and the opportunity to find a safe shelter. Less important reasons given were to develop their skills, which will allow Ukrainians to find a job

with decent wages in Poland in the future, or as an opportunity to study, due to the inability to do so in their home country. Many respondents emphasise that learning Polish is a path of self-development, self-improvement, and sometimes a gesture of gratitude for the support Poland shows to Ukrainians and Ukraine in general. Approximately half of the respondents suggest introducing Polish as a compulsory language in school and higher education institutions, along with English, French, German, and Spanish. This is explained by the prestige that knowledge of Polish gives when looking for a job, as it may soon become one of the mandatory criteria for job searches.

A survey was also conducted among teachers of Polish in Kyiv. A total of 14 people took part in the survey. They answered 8 questions similar to those answered by pupils and students:

1. Where did you Polish?
2. How many years have you been teaching Polish?
3. Where do you teach Polish?
4. What materials do you use?
5. What difficulties did you find while teaching Polish?
6. Which language (Ukrainian or Russian) makes it easier to learn Polish? Why?
7. Are there any of your students who have found themselves in unpredictable, difficult, war-related living conditions?
8. Do you think learning Polish is relevant and promising?

When asked about where they had studied Polish, 2 respondents reported to have been educated in Poland (14.3%), 9 in Ukraine (64.3%), and 3 studied in both Poland and Ukraine simultaneously (21.4%).



Figure 7. Where teachers studied Polish (author's own materials).

The respondents' work experience in teaching ranged from 2 to 17 years. Specifically, the distribution of experience is as follows: 2 years – 2 individuals (14.3%), 8 years – 2 individuals (14.3%), 10 years – 3 individuals (21.4%), 11 and 12 years – 1 individual each (7.1%), 14 years – 2 individuals (14.3%), 16 years – 1 individual (7.1%), and 17 years – 2 individuals (14.3%).

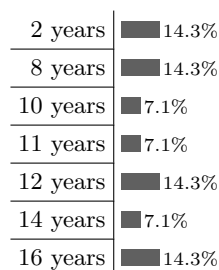


Figure 8. Work experience (author's own materials).

As for where the teachers work, 21.4% teach Polish in higher education institutions, 21.4% give private language courses, 14.3% give individual lessons (14.3%) and 14.3% work in general secondary education institutions.

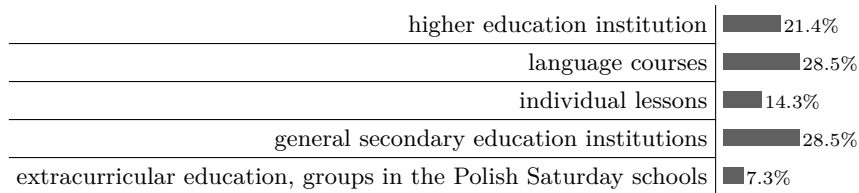


Figure 9. Where teachers of Polish teach (author’s own materials).

The materials used by teachers are primarily the Glossa book series *Krok po kroku* and *Hurra po polsku*, published by Prolog, as well as textbooks by other Polish publishers such as *Kiedys wrócisz tu*, *Od słowa do słowa toczy się rozmowa*, *Gramatyka z kulturą*, *Z polskim na ty* (Lipińska, 2006), *Pisać jak z nut* (Lipińska & Dąmbaska, 2016), *Język polski bez granic*, etc. Obviously, the teachers use additional materials and platforms during their lessons, and many of teachers create their own materials for teaching Polish.

Regarding the challenges faced during teaching, the majority of respondents (57.1%) mentioned power cuts and lack of Internet as significant obstacles. Additionally, some respondents highlighted psychological strain due to the country’s situation and lack of motivation (21.4%). Other difficulties mentioned were the absence of students and the limited availability of materials. Upon analysing the responses, it becomes evident that similar to the students surveyed, teachers and lecturers considered power outages to be the most prominent challenge, not psychological pressure or the threat of massive missile strikes. This underscores their professionalism and dedication to their work. Today, teachers and lecturers, regardless of their field of expertise, serve as motivators in the educational process, persevering and organizing educational activities despite these challenges. Their main goal is not only to teach but also to help us understand and overcome all the psychological and physical difficulties that come our way and inspire us to continue our work. Long before the full-scale invasion, Polish researchers Ewa Lipińska and Anna Seretny wrote about Polish language teachers in Chicago in their book *Między językiem ojczystym a obcym*, but it also perfectly describes Ukrainian Polish philologists in 2022/2023: “They treat their profession as a mission and a calling and they work with the conviction that working with children and young people is a source of satisfaction for them. They also see their profession as prestigious” (Lipińska & Seretny, 2012, p. 88). For most Ukrainian teachers and lecturers, teaching Polish during the war in Ukraine has become a valuable opportunity to help IDPs settle in new surroundings and to overcome the emotional difficulties faced by those who were forced to leave their homes and seek refuge in Poland.

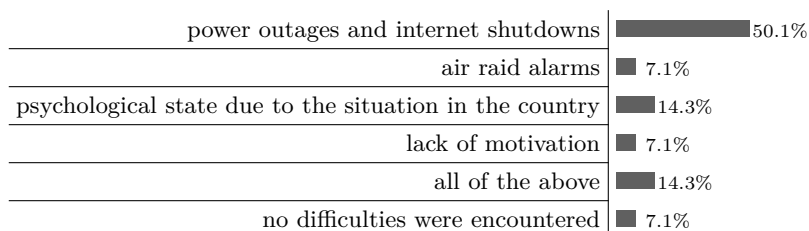


Figure 10. Where teachers of Polish teach (author’s own materials).

One of the questions we explored in the context of Ukraine’s language policy was whether learning Polish is easier with Ukrainian or Russian as a base language. Opinions on this matter were divided, and we encountered the following options and perspectives:

1. Knowledge of Ukrainian is more helpful: *"Ukrainian"*; *"Of Ukrainian. It is more harmonious and has many parallels in grammar"*; *"Knowledge of any additional language facilitates learning the Polish language, but for Ukrainian speakers, learning Polish is easier because Ukrainian and Polish share many words and grammatical constructions"*; *"Of Ukrainian. Let me draw parallels"*; *"of Ukrainian, obviously"*; *"Coincidence of 30% or less with the Ukrainian language. Although I believe that Polish is not entirely identical to Ukrainian!!! There is zero overlap with Russian"*; *"Of Ukrainian, sometimes Russian interferes, even though it is also a Slavic language"*; *"Of Ukrainian!!!!"*.
2. Knowledge of both languages: *"It doesn't matter which one, both help"*; *"Both. Because it is one language family, it is easy to explain in comparison"*; *"both languages, because Polish is a Slavic language. And knowledge of English and French also helps"*; *"The more languages, the better"*; *"both Ukrainian and Russian, because of the affinity of the languages"*, etc.

The above responses indicate a negative attitude towards the Russian language, which stems from current events. It is an indisputable fact that Russian, like Ukrainian, is a Slavic language, but a personal approach to language policy comes into play. Ukraine, which has been fighting for its right to exist, must defend its language and follow the example of its neighbours. Many years ago, Mikołaj Rej wrote: *"A niechaj narodowie wždy postronni znają, iż Polacy nie gęsi, iż swój język mają"* [„Let nations far and wide know, that Poles are not geese, that they have their language”] (Rej, 1562/2016). This quote is more relevant than ever and worthy of being followed.

An equally important question, given the military situation in Ukraine, was: “Are there any of your students who have found themselves in unpredictable and difficult living conditions related to the war?” As indicated by the aforementioned analysis, those who are currently learning the language have been compelled to make significant changes in their lives, such as relocating to another country or planning their future in Poland. Nearly all respondents selected the option ‘yes.’ Some of their responses include: *"Yes, the majority of them."*; *"Yes, I have students who are displaced from the war zones. I am currently working with a family whose house was destroyed in Kharkiv. I also work with parents who, along with their children, are now in Poland residing in a refugee centre."*; *"Yes, many students are currently facing challenging life circumstances"*; *"At the beginning of the war, almost everyone had such problems, including me. It was a difficult time. Now, for the most part, everyone has found a safer, more convenient, and comfortable place to stay."*; *"Yes, the majority of them. The events in the country served as a catalyst for learning the language."*

Thus, the study shows the relevance and prospects of learning Polish in the context of martial law in Ukraine. It is worth noting that this study was partial and, due to certain limitations, does not cover all higher education institutions in the Kyiv region, as Polish is also taught as an additional language at the National Technical University of Ukraine, the Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute, the Institute of Postgraduate Education, the Faculty of Linguistics of NTUU KPI. You can attend optional classes in Polish, at the National University of Kyiv–Mohyla Academy, Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University and other universities in Kyiv. This fact provides the opportunity to continue the research.

The prospects of studying this issue arise from several factors. Firstly, it is driven by the official stance of the state and the goal of integrating into the European educational space. Additionally, there is a need to develop a standardized algorithm for admitting Ukrainian students who have been displaced in Poland to educational institutions in Ukraine. Moreover, there is a crucial requirement for the recognition of Ukrainian documents pertaining to basic general secondary education and graduation results, allowing students to pursue higher education in Poland. Furthermore, it is worth highlighting that Ukraine is currently exploring the possibility of introducing a final exam in the Polish language as a foreign language. This consideration aligns with Poland’s own introduction of a modern Ukrainian language exam for the academic year 2025/2026. Today, Kyiv National Linguistic University has announced that citizens of the Republic of Poland will have the right to participate in the competition for a bachelor’s degree at the expense of the state

budget of Ukraine in 2023 on an equal footing with citizens of Ukraine. Admission will be based on the results of Poland's end-of-school exams. This is just the beginning, but we believe that the process will gain momentum. Such state processes will contribute to the educational development of interlingual communication. Learning Polish can be useful for Ukrainians in the context of the war of 2022/2023 for several reasons. Firstly, Poland is a neighbouring country, and knowledge of Polish can help Ukrainians communicate with Polish citizens who can provide support and assistance to Ukrainians affected by the war. Secondly, knowledge of Polish can open doors to new employment and study opportunities in Poland, which may be important for those Ukrainians who have fled their homes due to the war and are looking for new opportunities. Lastly, Polish is a language of the European Union, so learning it can be important for Ukrainians who plan to travel or move to EU countries. Learning Polish can become an additional incentive for Ukrainians during the war, as it can give them new prospects and opportunities in the future.

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